



## **LINCOLN CONSERVATION DISTRICT ANNUAL REPORT JULY 1, 2020 TO JUNE 30, 2021**

The past year has really been a struggle for many agriculture cooperators throughout the Lincoln Conservation District (LCD). Drought has always been a challenge for agriculture producers over the years, but this past year was exceptional. Last fall (2020), limited amounts of moisture were received, the ground moisture was very low going into the winter months. The high elevation snowpacks' water contents were on the low side for the first few months of winter but plummeted come spring. Drought conditions continued throughout the spring and summer months. When the water year ended on September 30, 2021, the LCD was rated in a severe drought condition according to the U.S. Drought Monitor Map.

This past year's drought has really caused economic havoc for a lot of LCD agriculture producers. Most hay and small grain producers rely on spring rains to get their crops off to a good start. This year was different with the first crop hay production being way down due to limited spring moisture. The second crop hay production was down since irrigation water was very short. Most producers had their water shut off due to junior

water rights. Only those that had irrigation wells or water storage reservoirs had water to irrigate crops.



*The Smiths Fork River northeast of Cokeville, WY, was at its lowest level in over 40 years.*

The poor moisture conditions have caused a hay shortage condition throughout the LCD. Some ranchers have been forced to sell their livestock since hay costs were very high, making it unprofitable to over winter livestock. Currently, agriculture producers may be able to weather one

drought year but several drought years in a row would eliminate most agriculture producers.

Luckily, the current precipitation levels for the new water year starting October 1, 2021, have been excellent throughout the LCD. Many precipitation monitoring sites are 200+ percent of median. High elevation mountain snowpack monitoring sites are off to a good start, with some sites way above median. It is concerning about the current climatic situation, but Mother Nature has a habit of keeping individuals on their toes and change is inevitable.

### **Leadership and Technical Staff for the LCD**

After the election last November (2020), the LCD board members remained the same with Erick Esterholdt, Chairman; Kenny Petersen, Vice Chairman; re-elected to office, Robert Peternal, Secretary/Treasurer; re-elected to office, Paula Bowling, Member; and Paul Clark, Member, re-elected to office. With the Covid-19 virus hanging around this past year, LCD board members had a challenge transacting district business, but through telephone conference calls board members were able to get the district activities completed. Board members are not financially compensated for their personal time, except for travel costs to conventions and meetings. Their passion for taking care of the district's natural resources is outstanding. They are the local grass roots entity that helps keep big government organizations from over-running local constituents.

Technical and administrative help for the LCD this past fiscal year was given by part-time employees, DeMont B. Grandy, Natural Resource Specialist and Brenda Lazcanotegui, District Clerk. USDA federal technical assistance for conservation of natural resources was given by Wade Payne, Local Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) Civil Engineering Technician Adam Clark, NRCS District Conservationist and Janessa Julson, NRCS Range Management Specialist, in Afton, Wyoming.

### **Some LCD Conservation Activities This Past Year**

#### **Rangeland Management and Improvement**

The LCD board members and staff continued their efforts to obtain Ecological Site Description (ESD) information for Tall Forb Communities in Bridger-Teton National Forest. This project is going to take several years of hard work. The LCD combined efforts with the Star Valley Conservation District (SVCD) and hired a retired NRCS Soils Scientist to obtain the detailed soil information for the different Tall Forb Sites. Due to the remoteness of the Tall Forb sites, it was necessary to access some of the sites by horseback and spend some nights camping out. Getting the necessary ESD information, both soils and vegetation, takes time and physical endurance, in addition to all the office time it takes to document and create an ESD site. It will be well worth it since without the ESD information, future renewable grazing allotment permits of U.S. Forest Service (USFS) may be jeopardized. Tall Forb sites are being used to determine the ecological condition within USFS grazed allotments.



*Two soil scientists dig and complete measurements for a Tall Forb Community Site on the Kemmerer Ranger District.*

The LCD supports noxious weed management on lands throughout the district. This past year, the district completed two previously obtained weed control grant projects. One was in the Upper Fontenelle River Basin on private land, mainly for Musk Thistle control, covering some 291 acres. The other noxious weed control project was within the Cumberland BLM Allotment covering several thousand acres of ground. Grants were obtained through the Wyoming Sage Grouse Working Group and the Ruby Pipeline Mitigation Fund.

The LCD is always working with state and

federal agencies to replace old woven wire fences within allotments to make the fences more wildlife friendly. This past year, the LCD obtained grants through the Wyoming Landscape Conservation Initiative (WLCI) program and the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust Fund (WNNRT) to replace an old woven wire fence within the Beaver Creek BLM Allotment. The fence posed a threat for migrating deer and elk. The old woven wire fence was replaced with a four-wire fence with correct spacing for wildlife crossing. The fence also provided for a rest rotation grazing system again to facilitate proper grazing use by livestock in the Beaver Creek riparian zones.



*An antiquated woven wire fence was replaced with a four-wire wildlife friendly fence in the Beaver Creek BLM Allotment.*

This past year, upland monitoring transects, photographic points, riparian green line transect, and ocular macroplots were established in the Lower Salt, Sams-Allen, Pole, Spruce, and Fontenelle Creeks USFS Allotments. Literally hundreds of rangeland monitoring sites have been established within these USFS allotments. The monitoring points, transect lines, and ocular circles will provide for comparison measurements in the future to determine upward or downward trends within the allotments. Ocular macroplots were also established in allotments that were burned by the Pole Creek fire in the past. It was noted that the Pole Creek fire had left poor ground cover conditions, resulting in noxious weed invasion, especially Musk Thistle. The fire was so hot it burned the organic surface soil completely in some areas, making natural native grass and forb establishment marginal. The LCD will be working

with the local USFS Kemmerer Ranger District to acquire grants and funds to control the Musk Thistle invasion caused by the Pole Creek fire. This needs to be a top priority for USFS managers.



*The Pole Creek fire in the Upper Hams Fork River Drainage was very hot, causing major reclamation problems.*

The RHAP has been an excellent tool to help permittees, private land managers, and government agencies gain the expertise to be able to monitor their rangelands' condition and utilization. After receiving help to establish monitoring transects, photo points, and utilization transects, permittees and ranchers now have the skills to work with their agency land managers and help monitor their rangelands. The Smithsfork BLM Allotment was once again monitored this past year for utilization levels on riparian zones using previously established RHAP monitoring sites. Even though conditions were very dry due to the drought, utilization levels were acceptable. The monitoring of riparian sites has proven helpful in knowing when to move livestock to another pasture avoiding overgrazing of the rangeland resources. Their past RHAP was very helpful in implementing a rangeland management system throughout the allotment that has been on-going for a number of years.

### **Water Quality**

The biggest water quality project the LCD helped the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality (WDEQ) accomplished was to obtain some random water quality baseline data for creeks, streams, and rivers within the Bear River Basin's

drainage area in the LCD. This project included the three states of Idaho, Utah, and Wyoming, which encompasses all of the Bear River Basin's drainage into the Great Salt Lake. It was a lofty project which included water quality staff from all three states. In order to keep everybody involved in the water quality techniques and sampling methods to be used, several combined state training sessions were conducted. Due to the drought conditions this past spring and summer, some creeks and streams dried up before sampling could occur, causing alternative random sites to be selected for sampling. Sampling occurred through the spring and summer months. The LCD helped with the monitoring of six sites to become aware of WDEQ sampling methods. The most interesting parameter the WDEQ employees completed was the bug count within the creeks, streams, and rivers. It is quite revealing how the ecological condition of a water way can be determined by the type of insects that are living in the waterbed under the rocks etc. This is a type of science that is becoming more used over the years to determine creek, streams, and river water quality conditions along with the physical and other biological parameters. The WDEQ's sampling completed will be used to compare with past water quality measurements. It is an on-going program for all the river basins within the State of Wyoming. This next year, the WDEQ plans to monitor large reservoirs and lakes within the state for water quality information.



*A WY Department of Environmental Quality employee collects insects from stream bed using a net.*

The LCD continued to sponsor a water quality

day to test domestic rural springs and wells for bacteria presence/absence. Other chemical parameters may also be tested to see if they exceed safe drinking water standards. The LCD has provided funding for bacteria testing through a grant from the Wyoming Department of Agriculture (WDA). Plans are to continue with this program again early next spring of 2022 even though funds are limited. Good drinking water has a high priority of LCD board members.

### **Conservation Planning**

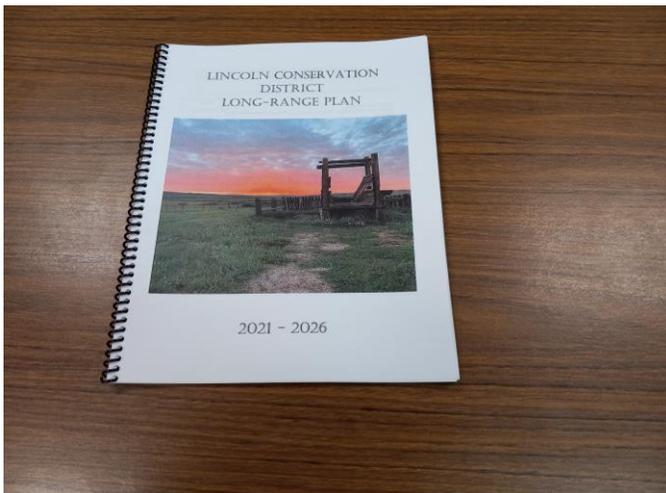
The LCD completed three subdivision reviews this past year. The LCD board members provide input on the soil limitations of subdivision lots for dwellings with and without basements, septic tank absorption fields, lawns, landscaping, paved and unpaved roads and shallow excavation etc. Board members also provide historical background information on proposed subdivisions sites that developers may not have addressed. The LCD can also give information on re-seeding disturbed areas and planting trees and shrubs.

This past year, the LCD has been participating in a Cooperating Agency meeting with the BLM concerning the development of a trona mine for Pacific Soda south of Green River City. Input has been given to help develop an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the proposed project. Once Pacific Soda gets permission to proceed with the project it will provide a number of temporary and full-time jobs in southwest Wyoming.

### **On-going District Programs**

The LCD offered seedling trees and shrubs again to help cooperators establish field and farmstead windbreaks. The LCD also cooperated with the Bear Lake Soil and Water Conservation District to provide single potted, larger ornamental shrubs, shade trees, and conifers for district cooperators. Over 600 plants were sold last year to cooperators. The 2021 – 2022 seedling tree and shrub sales program is already underway. Contact the LCD district office at (307) 279-3256 ext. 4 to get order forms and information for the programs. Remember, there are two great times to plant trees: the first was 20 years ago – the other time is now.

Every five years the LCD board members update their Long-Range Plan. This year board members and staff did a thorough review of the old Long-Range Plan. Outside comments and direction were requested from local, county, and federal agencies along with South Lincoln County residents. A public comment meeting was held on August 24, 2021, at the Cokeville Town Hall, Cokeville, WY, to address any concerns or additions to the proposed new five-year Long-Range Plan. The new Long-Range Plan for fiscal years 2021-2026 was approved at their September 28, 2021 board meeting and will be the direction the district will proceed for the next five years.



*The LCD board members and staff revised the district's Long-Range Plan this past summer.*

The LCD continued its involvement with the Coalition of Local Governments (CLG) this past fiscal year. The CLG has provided valuable input to state and federal agencies in the development of land management decisions in southwest Wyoming. Without the CLG's involvement, decisions would be made that could be detrimental to local residents' livelihoods and happiness. Sometimes it is necessary to band together with other surrounding conservation districts and counties to get the legal support and to curtail unnecessary state and federal mandates. A large voice usually does touch the strings of politicians and federal appointees.

### **Special Efforts**

The LCD continued efforts this past fiscal year to provide comments to PacifiCorp/Rocky Mountain Power in the development of the 2021

Integrated Resource Plan (IRP). It has been an uphill battle to keep a tune to PacifiCorp/Rocky Mountain Power's planning process. A lot of their plans contain schematics, drawings, and illustrations that are very hard to understand, along with the assumptions they make for the future direction of PacifiCorp/Rocky Mountain Power, which is quite grandiose. The LCD will need to work closely with the Wyoming Public Service Commission to ride herd over them, so agriculture power rates are reasonable and power service is reliable. Now PacifiCorp/Rocky Mountain Power plans to provide electrical power through natural gas and nuclear means. Their 2019 IRP appeared to emphasize wind and solar to generate electric power. It makes one wonder what type of riddle Pacifi-Corp/Rocky Mountain Power is trying to conjure.



*The Town of Cokeville and surrounding property owners already have a major electrical transmission line passing overhead just south of town.*

The other part of the puzzle PacifiCorp/Rocky Mountain Power is undertaking, is the construction of the Gateway West Electric Transmission Line to the northwest coast. The proposed power line goes through agriculture ground surrounding the Town of Cokeville and affects culture resources and quality of life of landowners having the high-powered transmission lines going over their properties and farmsteads. It is going to be a long drawn out process the next couple of years until a final decision is made. Hopefully, PacifiCorp/Rocky Mountain Power will use the local public input process instead of condemnation.

## Conclusion

Overall, this past year, a lot of conservation practices were constructed throughout the LCD with the assistance of the NRCS, US Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners for Wildlife Program, and the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust Fund. Construction monies for conservation practices have been difficult to find this past year, but the district partners have helped greatly.

Administrative money for the LCD activities and business this past year have been provided by the Lincoln County Commissioners and the WDA. The LCD board members are very appreciative of their financial help and input to district programs and activities.

This coming fiscal year will have its difficulties, but the resiliency of the LCD cooperators is excellent. Most agricultural producers are accustomed to setbacks and challenges; however, with the help of each other we will survive.

## **National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Report**

It has been a bit of a challenging year with the pandemic and doing more work remotely than in person. We continue to strive to help our producers the best way possible during this time. That has required more phone calls and emails than we are used to. Prices of materials have gone up, along with availability of materials going down. This has been a struggle for some of our contracts and applicants.

Projects in south Lincoln County in 2021 have included irrigation sprinkler systems, converting ditch to underground pipeline, harvesting hay in a wildlife friendly manner, and livestock operation improvements such as fencing, spring developments, tanks, and troughs. The NRCS office has already received applications and interest from south Lincoln County residents for Farm Bill programs for the 2022 funding cycle. The sign-up deadline for 2022 is November 22, 2021. All applications received before this deadline will be considered for funding next year.

NRCS continues to receive funds for the Sage Grouse Initiative. These funds can go towards cheatgrass treatments, rangeland seedings, cross fencing, spring developments, grazing management, and wildlife friendly mowing. (please refer to the picture below.)



*Field mowed in wildlife friendly manner with 30-ft. buffer left.*

As always, it has been great working with the Lincoln Conservation District (LCD). A huge thank you to the staff and board members. The district helps NRCS in many ways, including any technical assistance to administrative work or knowledge about past projects or land. Our NRCS employees cannot thank you enough in all you do.

**For more information about the Lincoln Conservation District programs and activities, please check out the district's web site at:**

**[www.lincolnconservationdistrict.org](http://www.lincolnconservationdistrict.org)**

## FINANICAL STATEMENT

<b>Balance on Hand July 1, 2020</b>	<b>\$ 56,098.28</b>
<b>Receipts for FY 2020 - 2021</b>	<b>103,871.37</b>
<b>Expenditures for FY 2020 - 2021</b>	<b>101,966.40</b>
<b>Balance on Hand June 30, 2021</b>	<b>\$ 57,973.21</b>

The Lincoln Conservation District is an equal opportunity employer, and offers all programs, services, and assistance on a nondiscriminatory basis, without regard to age, creed, marital status, national origin, physical or mental handicap, politics, race, religion, or sex.